Jesus Christ - Birth Announcement, Birth, Infancy and Youth
(Article)

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Behold, the virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call Him Immanuel” (which means, “God with us”).
Matthew 1:22–23 (BSB)

Introduction:

What is it that makes Jesus Christ unique? In order to answer this question, we are looking into the time before Jesus begins His ministry, especially His incarnation - commonly referring to Christ as ‘God-man,’ that is coming as ‘God in the Flesh.’ At the time in history when Jesus arrives, the Mosaic Law had served its purpose of revealing the utter sinfulness and helplessness of mankind in making themselves right, before God, solely by their own human effort. (1) This is where the miraculous conception of Christ comes into the picture, since His mother, Mary conceived Him not by human agency, but through the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:20; Luke 1:35). (2) Like the Gospel of John (John 1:1-18), the birth narratives in Luke and Matthew are not comprehensive accounts, but selective in presenting Jesus’ early life. (3) Keeping this in mind, we also see Old Testament prophecies fulfilled in and through Jesus Christ, thereby authenticating Him as the promised Messiah. (4)

The following is an exploration of Jesus Christ - before arriving on the scene and after His arrival. There are three parts in total. The first part deals with introductions to Jesus as found in the Gospels (John 1:1-18; Luke 1:1-4). The second part deals with the birth announcement, birth, infancy and youth of Christ as recorded in the Gospel of Luke. The third part investigates those same aspects of Jesus’ life (as in the second part) as far as they are recorded in the Gospel of Matthew. All this is done in a commentary form, scrutinizing selected passages and pointing out the theological significance for Christianity. (5)

Introduction to Jesus Christ

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made, and without Him nothing was made that has been made. In Him was life, and that life was the light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There came a man who was sent from God. His name was John. He came as a witness to testify about the Light, so that through him everyone might believe. He himself was not the Light, but he came to testify about the Light. The true Light who gives light to every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world did not recognize Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But to all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God— children born not of blood, nor of the desire or will of man, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. John testified concerning Him. He cried out, saying, "This is He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because He was before me.' " From His fullness we have all received grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is Himself God and is at the Father's side, has made Him known.
John 1:1–18 (BSB)

As far as introductions to Jesus Christ go, apart from His genealogies (in Matthew 1:1-17 and Luke 3:23-38), the Gospel of John (John 1:1-18) and the Gospel of Luke (Luke 1:1-4) provide insights into the uniqueness of Christ, which we are turning to now.

Commentary:

This segment traces the beginnings of Jesus Christ to eternity and talks about His incarnation, not mentioning His conception or birth. (6) The significance of this prologue can be found in the first verse, with "the Word"

referring to Jesus, revealing His pre-existence with God before creation - while not being identical to God the Father - yet, fully sharing in the Father's divinity. (7) It is here and in the following verses that we learn about Jesus being the eternally divine logos (Word), being the creator and source for all life (v.1-5), becoming the manifestation of 'God in the Flesh' (God incarnate) (v.14, 18) - in this way, we see a link between the doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of the incarnation, in that (for the former doctrine) Jesus is truly divine, and in that (for the latter doctrine) this divine Jesus is simultaneously truly human. (8)

Along with the deity of Christ, combined with the Old Testament verse found in Genesis 1:1-2, we can identify the three persons of the Trinity - Father, Son and Holy Spirit; we should note that the term 'Trinity' itself is not used in Scripture, it is assumed and conferred in other parts of the Bible (e.g. Luke 1:35; 3:22; Matthew 28:19; Galatians 4:6; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; Hebrews 10:29). (9) We will learn more about the Holy Spirit as we continue our exploration about Jesus in parts two and three of this article.

Birth, Infancy and Childhood of Jesus Christ (Gospel of Luke)

Many have undertaken to compose an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by the initial eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, having carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.
Luke 1:1–4 (BSB)

Commentary:

In contrast to John, Luke is addressing a different audience, likely a Greek person or group of people, since he is using a highly sophisticated Greek language. (10) The preface addresses a specific person ('Theophilus') (v.4) who also is addressed in Luke's companion volume - the Book of Acts (Acts 1:1-3), which makes Luke's Gospel, the only one with a follow-up book. (11) Unlike the Gospel of John, which mentions Jesus in the prologue (John 1:17), Luke only refers to Jesus as 'the Word' (Luke 1:2), which assumes that Theophilus already knows about Christ, affirmed by Luke referring to previous accounts about Jesus (v.1).

What matters most here is that Luke is emphasizing the validity of eyewitnesses and apostolic testimony (v.2) pointing to real events and facts, providing reassurance to Theophilus (for reasons unknown) and thereby for us (today) as well. Thus, thematically the witness is important to Luke and finds its continuation in the book of Acts, especially in dealing with the resurrection. (13) In its own unique way, then, this dedication to Theophilus is an introduction to Jesus Christ, that encompasses everything about Him (birth, infancy, adolescence, adult life, death and resurrection) - the first three aspects we are turning to next, in order to understand the complexity surrounding our Lord.

In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah, and whose wife Elizabeth was a daughter of Aaron. Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and decrees of the Lord. But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well along in years. One day while Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And at the hour of the incense offering, the whole congregation was praying outside. Just then an angel of the Lord appeared to Zechariah, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and gripped with fear. But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He shall never take wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb. Many of the sons of Israel he will turn back to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." "How can I be sure of this?" Zechariah asked the angel. "I am an old man, and my wife is well along in years." "I am Gabriel," replied the angel. "I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring

you this good news. And now you will be silent and unable to speak until the day this comes to pass, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled at their proper time.” Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he took so long in the temple. When he came out and was unable to speak to them, they realized he had seen a vision in the temple. He kept making signs to them but remained speechless. And when the days of his service were complete, he returned home. After these days, his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. She declared, “The Lord has done this for me. In these days He has shown me favor and taken away my disgrace among the people.”
Luke 1:5–25 (BSB)

Commentary:

As Luke begins his “orderly account” (Luke 1:3), that is an attempt towards a sequential (chronological) rendering of Jesus’ life, we are again reminded of the fact that Luke is not an eyewitness to the risen Christ, but rendering what he was able to investigate himself - the *only* gospel writer revealing *how* he went about researching and writing his account. (14)

The above passage deals with the angel Gabriel foretelling the birth of John the Baptist. Before Gabriel reveals himself, we learn more details about the historical framework (King Herod of Judea in v.5), specifies about John’s parents, Zachariah and Elizabeth showing their priestly ancestry (v.5) and their righteousness before God (v.6) even though Elizabeth had been childless, due to her being barren. (15) What matters most here is that we learn about the work of the Holy Spirit, filling John even before he is born, fulfilling the role of the Old Testament prophet Elijah and announcing the Baptist’s ministry calling Israel to repentance, as forerunner to the ministry of Jesus Christ. (16) The work of the Holy Spirit is what links John the Baptist to Jesus, the Messiah (born of a virgin through the activity of the Holy Spirit). (17)

In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin pledged in marriage to a man named Joseph, who was of the house of David. And the virgin’s name was Mary. The angel appeared to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.” Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. So the angel told her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor

with God. Behold, you will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever. His kingdom will never end!" "How can this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the Holy One to be born will be called the Son of God. Look, even Elizabeth your relative has conceived a son in her old age, and she who was called barren is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail." "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it happen to me according to your word." Then the angel left her.
Luke 1:26–38 (BSB)

Commentary:

In this passage we find out more about the conception and birth announcement of Jesus. Again, it is the angel Gabriel who informs the virgin Mary about the events that are about to unfold. The announcement of the virgin birth, points us directly to Jesus Christ, His Messiahship seen in His name, Jesus (meaning 'God saves') (v.31), His titles, "Son of the Most High" (v.32) and "Son of God" (v.35).

Jesus' conception through the Holy Spirit from a virgin is unmatched in the entire Bible, and is a supernatural event (in tandem with Christ's resurrection) forming the foundation of Christianity. (18) Christ's conception and birth referred to as 'incarnation,' means that God Himself through Jesus Christ has come as 'God in the Flesh,' thereby revealing Himself in a personal way to mankind - that way God enabling *every believer* in Christ - to enter into a personal relationship with God, since Jesus (born without sin, because of His supernatural conception through the Holy Spirit) atones for the sins of all believers through His work on the cross (2 Corinthians 5:19-21) reconciling Christians to God. (19)

In those days Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judah, where she entered the home of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why am I so honored, that

the mother of my Lord should come to me? For as soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord's word to her will be fulfilled."
Luke 1:39–45 (BSB)

Commentary:

Here we have the record of Mary visiting Elizabeth, a relative (see v.36) in an unnamed Hill Country in Judah (v.39-40). It is in this encounter, we see the working of the Holy Spirit's authority, as Elizabeth (filled with the Spirit) blesses Mary, as well as testifying to Jesus' divinity, referring to Him as "Lord," and revealing the baby in her womb (John the Baptist) leaping for joy. (20)

Then Mary said: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior! For He has looked with favor on the humble state of His servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed. For the Mighty One has done great things for me. Holy is His name. His mercy extends to those who fear Him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with His arm; He has scattered those who are proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones, but has exalted the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things, but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped His servant Israel, remembering to be merciful, as He promised to our fathers, to Abraham and his descendants forever."
Luke 1:46–55 (BSB)

Commentary:

This passage takes place while Mary is still with Elizabeth and shows us how Mary breaks out into a song (sometimes related to as 'hymn') recalling the Old Testament song (prayer) of Hannah (1 Samuel 2:1-10), pointing to Christ as the Messiah. (21) This is the first of three hymns in Luke 1-2, called the *Magnificat* (from the Latin word for "magnifies") - the second hymn by Zechariah in Luke 1:68-79 called the *Benedictus* (derived from the Latin word for "blessed") and the third hymn by Simeon in Luke 2:29-32 called the *Nunc Dimittis* (derived from the Latin words for "now dismiss"). (22)

When the time came for Elizabeth to have her child, she gave birth to a son. Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they rejoiced with her. On the eighth day, when they came to circumcise the child, they were going to name him after his father Zechariah. But his mother replied, “No! He shall be called John.” They said to her, “There is no one among your relatives who bears this name.” So they made signs to his father to find out what he wanted to name the child. Zechariah asked for a tablet and wrote, “His name is John.” And they were all amazed. Immediately Zechariah’s mouth was opened and his tongue was released, and he began to speak, praising God. All their neighbors were filled with awe, and people throughout the hill country of Judea were talking about these events. And all who heard this wondered in their hearts and asked, “What then will this child become?” For the Lord’s hand was with him.
Luke 1:57–66 (BSB)

Commentary:

The birth of John the Baptist as recounted here is important because he is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy as the one coming “in the spirit and power of Elijah” (see Luke 1:17), which is later confirmed by Jesus in Matthew 17:12-13. Luke closes with Zechariah’s hymn (Luke 1:67-79) in which he praises God, which is a prophecy fulfilled in John the Baptist, as Christ’s messenger (v.76-79) and Christ himself (v.77-79) with the call to repent, pointing to the salvation in and through the redemptive work of our Lord Jesus Christ. (23)

Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that a census should be taken of the whole empire. This was the first census to take place while Quirinius was governor of Syria. And everyone went to his own town to register. So Joseph also went up from Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, since he was from the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to him in marriage and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her Child to be born. And she gave birth to her firstborn, a Son. She wrapped Him in swaddling clothes and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.
Luke 2:1–7 (BSB)

Commentary:

This segment deals with the event of the birth of Jesus Christ providing many details. The reference to the Roman Emperor, Caesar Augustus, the governor Quirinius and the census taken at the time, leading Joseph and Mary to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem, shows how God is working in and through people to accomplish His divine plan, and fulfill Old Testament prophecy already predicting the location of our Savior's birthplace (Micah 5:2). (24) The events here are humbling and Christ's birth itself reminds us of this, as He is placed in a "manger" (a feeding trough for animals) (v.7).

And there were shepherds residing in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks by night. Just then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid! For behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people: Today in the city of David a Savior has been born to you. He is Christ the Lord! And this will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger." And suddenly there appeared with the angel a great multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom His favor rests!" When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and the Baby, who was lying in the manger. After they had seen the Child, they spread the message they had received about Him. And all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, which was just as the angel had told them.
Luke 2:8–20 (BSB)

Commentary:

The first witnesses to our Lord's birth, other than Joseph and Mary, as we see here are, shepherds nearby (v.8) and angels (v.9-14) proclaiming the arrival of the Messiah and giving the shepherds a sign (v.12) enabling them to meet Jesus Christ, which they do in expectation, humility and obedience (v.15-20). What is unusual is that shepherds at the time were not considered trustworthy and often despised, having a bad reputation (25) - and yet, God, who sees the heart of every person, reveals Himself to the shepherds,

providing three divine titles of Jesus (Savior, Christ and God) (v.11), leaving no doubt that the Messiah has come. (26)

When the eight days until His circumcision had passed, He was named Jesus, the name the angel had given Him before He had been conceived. And when the time of purification according to the Law of Moses was complete, His parents brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord: “Every firstborn male shall be consecrated to the Lord”), and to offer the sacrifice specified in the Law of the Lord: “A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.”
Luke 2:21–24 (BSB)

Commentary:

This section shows us the dedication of Jesus at the temple in Jerusalem. We see here the piety and dedication of Joseph and Mary, as they are faithful in keeping God’s law, that is the Mosaic law - circumcision as prescribed in the Old Testament (Leviticus 12:3-4), making an offering to God (Leviticus 12:8) this being “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons,” indicating that they were poor, not being able to purchase a lamb for a sacrificial offering. (27) Their faithfulness and godliness is also seen here in naming this child ‘Jesus’ as the angel of the Lord had commanded them (Luke 1:31).

Now there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. The Holy Spirit had revealed to him that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. Led by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. And when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for Him what was customary under the Law, Simeon took Him in his arms and blessed God, saying: “Sovereign Lord, as You have promised, You now

dismiss Your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to Your people Israel.” The Child’s father and mother were amazed at what was spoken about Him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to His mother Mary: “Behold, this Child is appointed to cause the rise and fall of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed— and a sword will pierce your soul as well.”
Luke 2:25–35 (BSB)

Commentary:

While still at the temple, there is an encounter with Simeon, who, having been led by the Holy Spirit identifies the infant Jesus as God’s “salvation” (v.30) and as a “light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to Your people Israel,” (v.32) which reveals that the Good News (gospel) is for both Jews and Gentiles alike, meaning all believers in Christ.

There was also a prophetess named Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher, who was well along in years. She had been married for seven years, and then was a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple, but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming forward at that moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the Child to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.
Luke 2:36–38 (BSB)

Commentary:

Along with the prayer of Simeon (*Nunc Dimittis*) (Luke 2:29-32) and his prophecy (Luke 2:34-35) we learn here about Anna, a prophetess, who also comes forward to testify about the Messiah and thereby emphasizing the surpassing greatness of Jesus’ ministry in contrast to John the Baptist. (28) The family then returns to Nazareth (Luke 2:39-40) where we find out that Jesus “grows strong,” is “filled with wisdom,” and “the grace of God being upon Him” (v.40).

Every year His parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. And when He was twelve years old, they went up

according to the custom of the Feast. When those days were over and they were returning home, the boy Jesus remained behind in Jerusalem, but His parents were unaware He had stayed. Assuming He was in their company, they traveled on for a day before they began to look for Him among their relatives and friends. When they could not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for Him. Finally, after three days they found Him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were astounded at His understanding and His answers. When His parents saw Him, they were astonished. "Child, why have You done this to us?" His mother asked. "Your father and I have been anxiously searching for You." "Why were you looking for Me?" He asked. "Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house ?" But they did not understand the statement He was making to them. Then He went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But His mother treasured up all these things in her heart. And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.
Luke 2:41–52 (BSB)

Commentary:

In this last part of chapter 2 we have the only account of Jesus as adolescent. What matters most here is that we find out about Jesus knowing about his unique relationship with God, at age twelve, his encounter in the temple with the religious teachers at the time (v.46-47) pointing to Christ's own role as teacher. (29) Also, Jesus's special divine relationship with God points at the covenantal relationship between God and His people, as He refers to having to "be in My Father's house," (v.49). (30) This is both comforting and reassuring for us as Christians, since we learn later about a similar promise of Jesus preparing a place for all believers:

> "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe in Me as well. In My Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and welcome you into My presence, so that you also may be where I am."
> John 14:1–3 (BSB)

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged in marriage to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit.
Matthew 1:18 (BSB)

Commentary:

While there are differences in the events surrounding the birth, infancy and childhood of Jesus in the Gospels of Luke and Matthew, there are also several points of agreement. Among the most important similarities, as seen in v.18, is the conception of Christ by the Holy Spirit. Note that Matthew begins his gospel with a genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1:1-17).

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged in marriage to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. **Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and was unwilling to disgrace her publicly, he resolved to divorce her quietly. But after he had pondered these things, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to embrace Mary as your wife, for the One conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a Son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Behold, the virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call Him Immanuel” (which means, “God with us”). When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him, and embraced Mary as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a Son. And he gave Him the name Jesus.**

Matthew 1:18–25 (BSB)

Commentary:

The connection of the virgin birth, better described as the ‘virgin conception’ through the work of the Holy Spirit stands out here (linking both the gospels of Matthew and Luke). (31) What is more, is that in Matthew’s account of Jesus’ birth announcement, we are reminded of Christ’s divinity, as an angel of the Lord reveals to Joseph in a dream that one of His names will be “Immanuel” (i.e. ‘God with us’) (v.23) a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (Isaiah 7:14; Isaiah 8:8; Isaiah 8:10). (32)

As we recall John 1:1-4, 14, we are again aware that Jesus Christ is God incarnate (‘God in the Flesh’) that is - both simultaneously human and divine, yet pre-existent. (33) The fulfillment of prophecy is at the forefront here, but also the obedience of Mary’s husband, Joseph, revealed in his surrender to God’s divine plan, after God tells him about the virgin conception, thwarting his initial plan to divorce Mary. (34) As such, we learn that God reveals the coming birth both to Mary (Luke 1:34-35) and Joseph (Matthew 1:20-23) and that the child’s name will be Jesus.

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, asking, “Where is the One who has been born King of the Jews? We saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him.” When King Herod heard this, he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had assembled all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written: ‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah, for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of My people Israel.’” Then Herod called the Magi secretly and learned from them the exact time the star had appeared. And

sending them to Bethlehem, he said: “Go and search carefully for the Child, and when you find Him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship Him.” After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stood over the place where the Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with great delight. On coming to the house, they saw the Child with His mother Mary, and they fell down and worshiped Him. Then they opened their treasures and presented Him with gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they withdrew to their country by another route.
Matthew 2:1–12 (BSB)

Commentary:

While the birth of Jesus has already taken place in Matthew’s account (v.1) we learn here about the visit of the Magi who seek out king Herod to find out more about the Messiah and His location (v.2). While we do not know much about the Magi (‘wise men’) we do know they are divinely guided by a star and have come to worship Jesus, which is an indication of God’s plan that salvation is prepared for all believers in Christ (Jews and Gentile). (35) As the Magi arrive a period of time of around two years following Christ’s birth have passed. (36)

What stands out here is that Old Testament prophecies are fulfilled regarding the birthplace of Jesus (v.4-6) and His Messiahship as “King of the Jews” (v.2). (37) Prior to His resurrection, as Jesus is dying on the cross, the supposed charge placed above His head reads, “This is Jesus, the King of the Jews,” (Matthew 27:37). Even though Herod is trying to outwit the Magi, he is no match to God’s sovereign care and guidance, and so the Magi locate Jesus and worship Him (v.9-11), but are also guided by God going back home on their own way - being warned in a dream - not to return to Herod (v.12).

When the Magi had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up!” he said. “Take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the Child to kill Him.” So he got up, took the Child and His mother by night, and withdrew to Egypt, where he stayed until the death of

Herod. This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called My Son.”
Matthew 2:13–15 (BSB)

Commentary:

This passage tells us about the flight of Jesus and His family to Egypt. Here we see God’s providential hand upon Jesus and His family, as God sends an angel to warn Joseph very specifically about impending danger (v.13).

As part of God’s providence, we see His divine care of protecting his Anointed One (Jesus Christ), all along working through obedient people, such as Joseph here, being warned by angels in a dream, guiding him with specific instructions to flee to Egypt (v.13-14) and returning after the threat has passed. (38)

When Herod saw that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was filled with rage. Sending orders, he put to death all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, according to the time he had learned from the Magi. Then what was spoken through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: “A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.”
Matthew 2:16–18 (BSB)

Commentary:

What follows here is the ‘killing of the innocents,’ revealing the nature of evil, as expressed in Herod feeling threatened in his position by the birth of Jesus, and thus ordering the murder of “all boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity,” (v.16) - age two years and under - as an outworking of Herod’s rage. (39) At the same time, there is Old Testament prophecy fulfilled (Jeremiah 31:15) - Herod’s murder, with an allusion to ‘Rachel,’ at the time of Israel’s Old Testament exile, personifying the Israelite mothers at the time. (40)

After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt. “Get up!” he said. “Take the Child and His mother and go to the land of Israel, for those seeking the Child’s life are now dead.” So Joseph got up, took the Child and His mother, and went to the land of Israel. But when he learned that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophets: “He will be called a Nazarene.”
Matthew 2:19–23 (BSB)

Commentary:

This segment concludes the first two chapters in Matthew’s gospel, as well as what the Bible tells us about Jesus’ infancy, complemented by Luke’s gospel (Luke 1-2). Again, an angel gives precise instructions for Joseph to follow, revealing God’s divine guidance (v.19) and specifics concerning the relocation of the family, due to ‘Archelaus’ ruling in Judea as Herod’s replacement (v.21-23).

There are multiple Old Testament prophecies fulfilled here, especially with relocating to “Nazareth,” since these prophecies refer to the Messiah as a ‘branch’ (Hebrew ‘netzer’ reminiscent of ‘Nazareth’) (Isaiah 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15; Zechariah 3:8; 6:12), hence the Messiah, Jesus Christ fulfills this outgrowth. (41) While the prophecies here remain implicit, it is worth noting that “he will be called a Nazarene” (v.23) correlating the aforementioned ‘branch’ to Jesus Christ, who is then known as a Nazarene, since he lives in Nazareth. (42)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
John 1:1 (BSB)

Conclusion:

To sum up: What are we to make of all of this? In brief, as seen, the birth announcement, birth, infancy and youth reveal the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. For one, we realize the importance of the virgin birth, that is the incarnation of Christ, since coming as ‘God in the Flesh,’ is just as supernatural as his resurrection and ascension (following His crucifixion and

death), thereby pointing uniquely to His divinity. (43) This is important, since only through Christ's substitutionary death, atoning for the sins of all Christians, is salvation available only in and through Him (John 14:6; 15:5). (44)

Likewise, as discussed in the introduction to Jesus Christ, we see how the 'Word' (Jesus) entered the sphere of history, space and time, to uniquely disclose God's grace and glory. (45)

Also, the work of the Holy Spirit is revealed even prior to Jesus' birth, seen in the birth announcements of both Jesus and His forerunner, John the Baptist, as well as in the lives of Zechariah, Elizabeth (the Baptist's parents), the life of Simeon, and especially in the miraculous conception of Christ - the Holy Spirit then arriving at Pentecost coming upon Jesus' followers (Acts 2:1) and anyone who will ever believe in Jesus. (46)

At the same time, we are confronted here with real events and facts in history, which are neither myth, nor midrash (a form of Jewish commentary on Hebrew Scripture) (47) nor are they man-made embellished fabrications, as are found in apocryphal works, which are not part of the Bible. (48) (49)

Furthermore, as we have found in both Luke and Mark, there are numerous prophecies fulfilled in and around Jesus Christ (His incarnation, His birth and events linked to His life), just in Matthew 1-2, for instance, we find five Old Testament passages fulfilled at the time of our Lord's infancy, some being more straightforward than others in their limited fulfillment, most prominently the Messiah's birthplace in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2; Matthew 2:5-6). (50)

In addition, (unlike the Gospel of Mark which starts with Jesus having grown up) (51) we have one singular account of Jesus' youth ('The twelve-year old Jesus in the Jerusalem Temple' in Luke 2:41-52) which demonstrates His unique divinely given abilities seen in His discussions with the religious teachers at the time (52) and His uniquely divine relationship with God - the Father, (as we have Jesus' first recorded words in the Gospels:

> "Why were you looking for Me?" He asked. "Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house ?"
>
> Luke 2:49 (BSB)

Then, as we consider the supernatural realm, we see the appearance and work of angels, as messengers of God, and divinely guiding the people to follow God's providence, as He is protecting Jesus Christ, most notably in Herod's failed plot to kill baby Jesus. (53)

Finally, all of the events taken together, point divinely to the unique miraculous fulfillment of God's promise in and through Jesus Christ as Messiah (54), affirmed in Matthew 1:23 that Jesus is 'God with Us' ("Immanuel") later reaffirmed in Christ's own words:

> "…and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, even to the end of the age."
> Matthew 28:20 (BSB)

We are reminded here that as believers, we are commanded to worship Jesus Christ and Him only, since we place our hope, faith and love in Him, unlike man-made religious belief systems that do not point to the cross. (55) The main reason for this is that one purpose of Christ's incarnation has not yet been fulfilled, and that is His Second Coming: Jesus is returning (Matthew 25:31-34; Philippians 3:20-21; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10. (56) Therefore, since we see the uniqueness and divinity of Christ in His birth and childhood, the question we must ask ourselves is - Are we ready for Christ's return?

Appendix A

Glossary - (57)

Angel - A created spiritual being, literally a “messenger” (a), p.12.

Anna - A God-fearing widow, who testifies about baby Jesus, while meeting Him and His family at the Jerusalem temple (Luke 2:36-38).

Apocryphal Gospels - Books and book fragments with fictitious sayings and stories about Jesus - including apparent stories about Jesus’ birth and childhood (so-called ‘infancy gospels’) not included in the NT canon (e.g. the so-called ‘Gospel of Thomas,’ ‘Gospel of Peter,’ ‘Gospel of Judas, etc.). (b), p.50-51.

Archelaus - Son of Herod the Great; ruled Judea until he was ousted by the Romans. (b), p.632.

Atonement - Christ’s work on the cross (His life and death, followed by his resurrection) to earn our salvation for believers. (c), p.1236.

Bethlehem - Birthplace of Jesus Christ, fulfilling the prophecy of Micah 5:2. (b), p.632.

Caesar Augustus - Also known as ‘Octavian,’ (63 BC - AD 14) ruled the Roman Empire at the time of Jesus’ birth (Luke 2:1). (b), p.632.

Christ - Title used for the description of Jesus as Messiah - literally, “the anointed one.” (a), p.31.

Elizabeth - Mother of John the Baptist and testifying about Jesus Christ as Messiah before His birth, when Mary visits her. (Luke 1:39-45).

Extra Biblical Evidence - Some evidence of Jesus' life outside of the Bible exists, such as Tacitus who refers to Christ's death under Pilate in the time of Caesar Tiberius (who ruled from AD 14-37) (see Luke 3:1), and such as Seutonius who refers to Jewish quarrels in Rome about a 'Chrestus' (most likely Christ and Christians) who faced expulsion from Rome (see Acts 18:2). (d), p.322.

Faith - Relying upon or trusting in someone or something outside of ourselves - for Christians - salvation, which is a result based solely on God's grace, received through faith alone, in Christ alone. (Romans 5:2; Ephesians 2:8-9). (e), p.14.

Galilee - A region in Jesus' time north of Samaria and Judea, where Jesus grew up (Matthew 2:19-23) and had a major share of His ministry (with Capernaum as one of His most prominent locations of ministry).

Herod - Also known as 'Herod the Great,' ('Herod I') an Edomite ruler of Israel from 37-4 BC. (b), p.637.

Holy Spirit - One of the three Persons of the Trinity, along with the other two (God-the Father and God-the Son, Jesus Christ). (c), p.1244

Hypostatic Union - The preincarnate and incarnate Jesus Christ, the "God-man." (f), p.240.

Incarnation - God taking on the form of human flesh, through Jesus Christ as 'God-man' (a person of the Trinity) - a mystery (John 1:1, 14). (g), p.264.

Jerusalem - City in Judah with the Jerusalem Temple as the main place of worship at the time of Christ - the central and only place for sacrifices (Deuteronomy 12:5-14). (b), p.638.

Judea - Region west of the Dead Sea (Salt Sea) with Jerusalem, where Jesus is dedicated at the Temple (Luke 2:41-52), visits as a twelve-year old boy and completes His ministry in the final week of His life ('Passion Week'), arrested, tried and crucified, dies and is resurrected.

King David - Ruler of the early kingdom of Israel, and ancestor of Jesus Christ the Messiah - God making His covenant with David and descendants forever - 2 Samuel 7; 2 Chronicles 13:5) (also see Luke 1:32). (a), p.47.

Logos - In the gospel of John this is a title given to Jesus - a Greek term, explaining Christ as God's self-revelation. (b), p.639.

Lord - Someone of superior authority or status, like ‘master,’ translated from various Old Testament and New Testament Hebrew titles, mainly referring to Jesus. Greek translates the term from the Hebrew Yahweh (YHWH), which is the personal name of God. (e), p.18.

Magi - Most likely Arabian or Persian astrologers, who are let by a star to Jesus Christ. (b), p.640.

Mary - Wife of Joseph and mother of Jesus, who is miraculously conceived in her womb - without human agency, through the Holy Spirit.

Midrash - A rabbinic interpretation of the Old Testament Scriptures, often linked to fictional additions to the original text. (b), p.640.

Nazareth - A village in Galilee in which Jesus grows up. (b), p.641.

Providence - God’s sovereign, wise and good guidance as He controls all things, supplies the needs of believers in accomplishment of His holy will. (e), p.18.

Quirinius - Syrian governor at the time just prior to Jesus’ birth (Luke 2:2). An extrabiblical reference to a ‘Quirinius’ who governed roundabout ten year later is reconcilable, since he could have also been in this position earlier. (h), p.247.

Redeem - Through His work on the cross, Jesus redeems all believers from slavery to sin along with its consequences. (Colossians 1:13-14). (e), p.10.

Salvation - The deliverance of a believer by God’s divine act from the curse and power of sin, thereby restoring a person back to individual fellowship with God - as God had intended originally. (a), p.175.

Shepherds - A group of people, often looked down upon as outcasts, having a bad reputation. After Mary and Joseph, the first witnesses to Jesus Christ as Messiah, they are glorifying God and witnessing that the Messiah has come (Luke 2:8-20).

Simeon - Devout and godly man, witnessing ‘to and prophesying’ about the Messiah, as he meets Mary and Joseph dedicating baby Jesus at the Jerusalem temple (Luke 2:25-35).

Son of God - A Messianic title for Jesus, pointing to a unique relationship with God the Father (Luke 1:35). (b), p.645.

Temple - A permanent house of worship of God, erected at Jerusalem. Destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70, following a Jewish revolt.

The Fall of Mankind - The original sin, as a result of Adam and Eve's disobedience to God, leads to losing their favourable standing with God (Genesis 3). Jesus' work on the cross (atonement) reconciles believers back to God.

Trinity - The biblical teaching that God exists as three persons (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) - each Person is fully God; and there is one God. (c), p.1256.

Virgin Birth - More accurately referred to as virgin conception, when Mary conceived Jesus miraculously, through the supernatural intervention of the Holy Spirit. (b), p.648.

Zechariah - Father of John the Baptist, a witness to God's divine plan of using his son to prepare the way for Jesus Christ (Luke 1:5-25, 1:57-80).

(57) Glossary terms adapted from:

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Pastor John

Amen.